TED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Secretary-General tells Conference on Liberia United Nations is committed to early implementation of Abuja Agreement; calls for rapid and important action to support peace.

* DPI has demonstrated its ability to do more while spending less, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information tells Special Political and Decolonization Committee.

* General Assembly commemorates tenth anniversary of International Youth Year; hears statements by youth representatives from several countries.

* As Disarmament and International Security Committee observes Disarmament Week, General Assembly President says support for United Nations must be translated into practical action.

* Local civilian vehicles enter Sarajevo through Serb-held territory for first time since Bosnian war began; Co-Chairman of ICFY has several meetings on Eastern Slavonia.

* Human Rights Committee discusses possibility of requesting States to submit reports on specific human rights situations when necessary.

* DPI to open annual Inter-Agency Information Fair at Headquarters on Monday; 30 United Nations agencies, programmes and offices to participate.

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The United Nations is committed to the early implementation of the Abuja Peace Agreement, but the decision to make peace rests, ultimately, with those who have made the war, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In an opening address to the Conference on Assistance to Liberia, he said a lasting peace required strong and stable foundations. Comprehensive national political leadership was needed. Reconciliation was the cornerstone of peace, and must be built upon with care and compassion.

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For information media—not an official record

Liberia had long been a forgotten emergency, as conflicts elsewhere had dominated international attention, the Secretary-General continued. The costs of peace-keeping in the former Yugoslavia for five days equalled the entire budget of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) for a year. "This distortion in the use of resources demands correction. Today offers an opportunity."

The most immediate need was humanitarian assistance, he said. With peace, previously inaccessible populations could be reached. Essential services must be provided or rehabilitated. The second need was disarmament and demobilization. Third, recovery and rehabilitation required rapid action. The international community must play a major role, with support from financial institutions. Fourth, the capability of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG) must be assured. Even a relatively small investment would bring significant benefit not only to Liberia but to the region and to Africa as a whole.

"I trust your meeting this morning will reflect a solid commitment to support the peace process in Liberia," the Secretary-General concluded. "I also look forward to the outcome of the technical discussions which you will hold this afternoon. It is my sincere hope that your exchange of information and ideas will lead to rapid and important action to support peace in Liberia."

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Today's global problems are a "testament to why the voice of the United Nations must be heard more clearly and loudly than ever before", according to Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information. He made that comment to the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) yesterday as it began its consideration of questions relating to information.

Many delegations had expressed concern that public information activities could be severely hampered by the United Nations financial crisis at a time when they should be redoubled, Mr. Sanbar said. While public interest in the Organization was at an all-time high, its message had to compete for attention as never before. Ways had to be found to sharpen the focus on current issues and reach the widest possible audience.

The Department of Public Information (DPI) had risen to meet the challenge head-on and had demonstrated its ability to do more while spending less, he continued. New budget proposals for 1996-1997 presented a negative growth rate of 3.2 per cent, compared to the 1994-1995 budget. Those proposals had been made possible by the better use of technology, close cooperation with other parts of the United Nations system, and management initiatives that streamlined the Department.

A major element of DPI's overall strategy was the establishment of strong partnerships with the media, he went on to say. A public information culture could be a crucial asset in gaining support for the Organization, and should be cultivated to create deeper understanding of the media's role as allies who needed information to tell the facts. The Department aimed to ensure that news headlines did not exclusively focus on the flashpoints of conflict at the expense of efforts in development, social justice and democratization.

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The General Assembly has been commemorating the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year. Fifteen speakers, including seven youth representatives, addressed the Assembly yesterday, focusing on the vulnerability of youth to poverty, wars and unemployment.

When half of the young population lived beneath the poverty line, as in Panama, it was not surprising that the young vacillated between hope and despair, the youth representative from that country said. Referring to the migration of youth from rural to urban areas, the representative of Indonesia warned that "many young people awake to discover that development may in fact pass them over, leaving behind a disillusioned and alienated generation".

The Presidential Adviser on Youth Affairs of the Philippines called for greater attention to the plight of young migrant workers, who were particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The Representative of the Republic of Korea told the Assembly that social development efforts in developing countries must incorporate the interest of the young, as they were the main victims of poverty and conflict.

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The First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) today held a special meeting in observance of Disarmament Week. General Assembly President Diogo Freitas do Amaral (Portugal) said that a theme echoing through the recent fiftieth anniversary celebrations had been the irreplaceability of the United Nations. That support should now be translated into initiatives and practical actions in all domains of the Organization's endeavour, including disarmament.

Yesterday, the observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross told the Committee that the recent adoption of a Protocol banning the use or transfer of blinding laser weapons had been "a triumph of civilization over barbarity." That action was taken at the Review Conference of States Parties to the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Although the Conference had failed to agree on the issue of land-mines, its adoption of Protocol IV was a major achievement -- it was the first time since 1868 that a weapon had been prohibited before its use on the battlefield.

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Local civilian vehicles today entered Sarajevo through Serb-held territory for the first time since the war began in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to a United Nations spokesman. A convoy of four trucks carrying flour and cement were escorted into the city by French peace-keepers. Opening the Bosnian capital and the eastern enclave of Gorazde to civilian traffic was an important part of the cease-fire agreement signed by the Bosnian parties earlier this month.

Meanwhile, the Co-Chairman of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, Thorvald Stoltenberg, met yesterday with representatives of France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Spain in Paris to review the overall situation in Eastern Slavonia. Mr. Stoltenberg met with the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), Slobodan Milosevic, in Belgrade today. He was due to meet with Serb representatives in Erdut tomorrow.

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The Human Rights Committee this week discussed the possibility of taking special decisions to request a State party to submit a brief report whenever the Committee deemed it necessary. The Committee was of the view that in the intervals between the submission of periodic reports, specific situations could arise in a particular State which needed close examination.

As the Committee focused on its methods of work, it also suggested the possibility of considering the situation of human rights in States parties which were in serious default of their obligations under article 40 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. That suggestion was aimed at States parties with initial or periodic reports overdue for more than five years or with more than one report overdue.

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The annual Inter-Agency Information Fair, organized by the Department of Public Information (DPI), will open in the General Assembly Public Lobby on Monday. The five-day Fair is intended to acquaint the public and those who visit Headquarters with the scope of activities undertaken by the United Nations system. It will highlight the work of 30 United Nations agencies, programmes and offices.

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